

TOWN OF WOODSTOCK

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# Press Release

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WOODSTOCK, CT, SEPETMBER 30, 2021:

## **Woodstock Encourages Public Input on American Rescue Plan Funds**

From the Office of the First Selectman: The Town of Woodstock is working to ensure there are multiple ways for its citizens to provide input and ask questions about the use of funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

At the August 5<sup>th</sup> Board of Selectmen's meeting, First Selectman Jay Swan proposed that the monthly third Thursday BOS meeting have an ARPA update added as a regular agenda item and move from 4 pm to 7 pm. These meetings will be held via Zoom to encourage greater participation, and people can watch at their convenience if they can't make the meeting. This change begins with the September 16<sup>th</sup> BOS meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

A presentation and Open Public Forum regarding ARPA is scheduled for October 12<sup>th</sup> at the Woodstock Middle School. Citizens will have the opportunity to ask questions, provide suggestions, and weigh-in on proposed uses for ARPA funds. The forum will take place immediately following a Special Town Meeting at 7 pm. More information about the meeting can be found at <https://www.woodstockct.gov/town-clerk>.

In addition, questions, suggestions, or comments about ARPA funds can be sent to [arpa2021@woodstockct.gov](mailto:arpa2021@woodstockct.gov). Frequently Asked Questions, the BOS ARPA presentations, and more can be found on the News section of the town website, [www.woodstockct.gov](http://www.woodstockct.gov).

"We are actively seeking public input on how these funds should be allocated" states Swan. "We hope citizens make use of the ARPA email address, attend the public forum on October 12<sup>th</sup>, and tune in via zoom or watch the BOS meetings on their own time to learn more about the ARPA program. We will be updating the ARPA news section of our website as we receive more information and have a survey available to gather more data on how Woodstock residents would like to see these funds used. This will be an ongoing conversation."

ARPA was signed into law by President Biden in March of 2021 and provides funds to state and local governments. Municipalities have until December 31, 2024, to obligate the funds for specific purposes. First Selectman Swan states that Woodstock is considering public health, safety, and infrastructure as possible priorities for these funds. To that end, he has had conversations with the Board of Finance Chair, Director of Public Works, Woodstock Fire Protection Association President, Water Pollution Control Authority Chair, Emergency Management Director, Chief Constable, TEEG, and more.

Eligible uses for ARPA funds include supporting the public health response to contain and mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and possible future pandemics, and make needed investments in water, sewer, or broadband infrastructure. It also provides funding for COVID-19 related harm from March 2021 to December 2024. Selectman Kline states, “There are at least two principles that we need to follow as we sort this out: ARPA funds can be used to mitigate losses and problems caused by the pandemic, and the entire process needs transparency. Projects and proposals need to be discussed in public with the opportunity for citizens input.”

Finance Director Karen Fitzpatrick states that ARPA funding may not be used to pay down unfunded pension, apply as matching funds towards grants, pay outstanding debt or legal settlements, offset taxes, or contribute to “rainy day” funds. According to Fitzpatrick, “Our auditor, Mike VanDeventer from Mahoney Sabol has been working on the calculation for the revenue loss recovery for Woodstock, once we have that dollar amount the Board of Selectmen can determine how to move forward with prioritizing the use of the ARPA funds.”

According to Board of Finance Chair Mike Dougherty, “Careful, considerate planning is needed to ensure that the Town of Woodstock gets the most use for the common good with these funds. This is something which should not be rushed into and ultimately has a long-term positive effect town-wide.”

Selectman Paquette concurs. “We need to assess our needs and look into the best uses for these funds. We don’t want to act with haste at this point. The Board of Selectmen wants to hear from citizens, boards, and commissions as we seek to put together a comprehensive list of possible plans for these funds.”